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AUTHOR Lazarus, Peggy G.
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ABSTRACT

In anticipation of providing a baseline of competencies on which teachers and school researchers could build, an ethnographic study was conducted of the communicative competencies of kindergarten children as revealed in spontaneous speech occurring across entire school days. Nonparticipant and, occasionally, participant observation methods were used to collect data for 22 days on three occasions during the school year in a public school kindergarten attended by approximately 20 middle-class, white native speakers of English. Audiotapes of whole-group, small-group, and individual activities were made and transcribed, and continuous log notes were made to identify speakers and contexts. Data were twice reduced: first by deleting teacher soliloquies and then by isolating conversational exchanges surrounding problem statements, strategies, or solutions. Hymes' Ways of Speaking taxonomic acronym was used to locate communicative competencies in that remaining portion of the record which concerned problems. Statements referring to problems were found to be distributed in four areas: sociolinguistic, linguistic, social, and cognitive. In the sociolinguistic area, three categories of kindergarten children's competencies were found: metalinguistic awareness of regularities in language use; ability to publicize confusions or problems; and, most dramatic, the artful variation of the components of the Ways of Speaking to accomplish a purpose. Findings are discussed. (RH)

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Kindergarten Children's Communicative Competence: Findings from an Ethnographic Study

by

Peggy G. Lazarus

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
P.O. Box 23029 TWU Station
Texas Woman's University
Denton, TX 76204

Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada, April, 1983.

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Kindergarten Children's Communicative Competence: Findings from an Ethnographic Study

Peggy G. Lazarus

Texas Woman's University

The range of children's communicative competencies in school has yet to be explored by teachers or by educational researchers. According to Ervin-Tripp (1969) "Competence in speaking includes the ability to use appropriate speech for the circumstances, and when deviating from what is normal to convey what is intended." This broad definition includes communication in informal as well as formal situations and creative strategies to convey the speaker's purposes. Applied to a classroom, communicative competence includes not just the speech of formal lessons, but also the speech produced at other times; not just speech used for teacher purposes, but also that used for student purposes.

Teachers can, of course, be only selectively aware of children's abilities. Their judgments are affected by reliance on children's test performances (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), student responses during lessons (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), and the congruence of the child's style with particular educational goals (Michaels & Cook-Gumperz, 1979). Morever, for some teachers, curriculum guides determine the competencies of children to which they are bound to attend. In addition, the exigencies of directing a classroom preclude the teachers' consideration of indices of competence that children might be displaying in less formal activities. If, however,

teachers could become more aware of other competencies important to children for success in the daily life of the school day, they could both foster and teach to the acquisition of those competencies.

Until recently, most educational research did not address the question of students' communicative competence as broadly defined. There was, as Brophy and Evertson (1978) suggest, a preoccupation with teacher behavior as opposed to student performance. When student behaviors were examined, it was their display in formal lessons that was investigated (Bremme & Erickson, 1977; Green & Wallat, 1981; McDermott, 1976; Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).

More recently, the approach has been to determine children's communicative competence in peer interaction. Ability in these studies is analyzed in terms of specific speech acts in particular activities (Cook-Gumperz & Corsaro, 1976; Cooper, Marquis & Ayres-Lopez, 1982; Garvey, 1977; Genishi, 1982; Newman, 1978; Wilkinson, 1981). These studies have been seminal. They focus attention on features that can be used diagnostically. But still missing is a framework that would highlight children's communicative competence across all the speech events of the school day. Identification of the range of individual competencies throughout whole sessions as revealed in spontaneous speech would greatly enhance our evaluation of their performance in particular speech events. The Ways of Speaking complied by Hymes (1972) provides a comprehensive framework that can be used to identify the children's competencies in formal and informal school situations. According to Hymes (1972):

> Ways of speaking is used as the most general, indeed, as a primitive term. The point of it is the regulative idea that communicative behavior within a community is analyzable in terms of determinate

> ways of speaking, that the communicative competence of persons comprises in part a knowledge of determinate ways of speaking . . . A shift in any of the components of speaking may mark the presence of a rule (or structured relation), e.g. from normal tone of voice to whisper, from oral English to slang, correction, praise, embarrassment, withdrawal and other evaluative responses to speech may indicate the violation or accomplishment of a rule. In general, one can think of any change in a component as a potential locus for the application for a "sociolinguistic" commutation test: What relevant contrast, if any, is present? (p. 58, 65-66)

Hymes subsumes the components of the ways of speaking under the acronym Speaking. See Appendix A which describes the components in abbreviated form.

Insert Hymes Summary (Components of Ways of Speaking)

It is clear that more comprehensive, even exploratory research is needed. Recently, several large-scale studies have adopted more comprehensive frameworks. (See the review, Research on Teaching as a Linguistic Process: A State of the Art by Green (1983).)

The research on which this paper is based was designed to discover communicative competencies of children which had not previously been identified or given sufficient recognition. Kindergarten children were the focus, in anticipation of providing a base-line of competencies on which teachers and school researchers could build. The language production of one kindergarten class throughout whole sessions was audio-taped. The analysis was based upon the transcripts of the tapes.

Methodology

Research Design

The research problem dictated the choice of an ethnographic design. The researcher acted as non-participant observer and occasionally as participant

observer. As a non-participant observer, I audio-taped whole group activities as well as small group and individual activities. All children had an equal chance of representation in the whole group activities; in an experimental task, Draw and Tell, which was accomplished in partnerships; and in a small group activity to which all children were sequentially assigned. In addition, care was taken to balance participation on the tapes by varying my choice of observation post during small group activities.

As participant observer, I interacted with the children, in response to their questions, and in general conversation. In addition, my discussion with the teacher about Sharing Time procedures resulted in a major change to a different structure for Sharing Time during the course of the research.

Site Selection

After a pilot study of several classrooms in Albuquerque and Los Alamos, New Mexico, a Los Alamos kindergarten in which spontaneous talk predominated was selected. The classroom was in a public school serving a middle-class community.

Time Period

Data were collected over 22 days. There were three separate periods of data collection. The first period included five days in November and December, the second included ten consecutive days in January, and the third involved seven visits in March for special occasions and follow-up activities. March sessions were not recorded in their entirety.

Subjects

All but one of the students were native white speakers of English. In January, when the consecutive days of data collection occurred, the average

age of the subjects was 5 years and 9 months. There were 21 subjects at the beginning of the research and 18 at the end. Excluding the three students who transferred out, attendance was 97% and no child was absent more than 2 of the 15 days of the main collection period.

Collection of Data

The audio-tapes were run throughout the session. In addition, I took continuous log-notes to identify speakers and contexts. Frequent informal conversations with the teacher concerning the day's events and reactions to the transcriptions provided information on the teacher's perspective. School records were examined.

Data Analysis

The audio-tapes were meticulously transcribed by the researcher. Samples of the transcriptions were checked by another experimenter. The only discrepancies noted were systematic omission of short utterances (Oh and uh). During the transcribing, the first reduction of data occurred. Since the focus of the research was on children's language, teacher soliloquies were omitted. All teacher statements surrounding child utterances were retained.

There were 27 hours of audio-tape and some 17,000 speaking turns of which about three-quarters were child turns. Log notes permitted identification of about 75% of both adult and child speaking turns. Protocols for each child were separately compiled based on their identified utterances. The mean number of identified speaking turns per child was 444, with a range of 268-719 and a standard deviation of 128. A chart of the frequency distribution for all participant by each activity for periods I and II is included in Appendix B.

Emergent Categories

The transcripts were repeatedly reviewed for emergent categories. It became clear in these reviews that conversations relating to problems defined as "whatever--no matter how slight or commonplace in character--perplexes and challenges the mind" (Dewey, 1910, p. 9) were the most revealing of competence. This motivated the second reduction of data. Exchanges surrounding problem statements, strategies, or solutions were isolated for further analysis.

Problem statements were distributed in four areas: sociolinguistic, linguistic, social, and cognitive. This paper reports the communicative competence of the kindergarten children in the sociolinguistic area. The speech community is that of the middle-class, native English speaking population of the town to which the children, the teacher, and the researcher all belonged. The speech situation consists of the school day. The speech events are the regularly recurring activities as organized by the teacher:

Arrival Time
Group Meeting
Sharing Time (first session)
Specials (Music, Library, Physical Education (P.E.), Guidance)
Sharing Time (second session)
Work Time or Committee Time
Recess, Evaluation, Discussions (all optional)
Sustained Silent Reading
Story Time
Departure

The language produced is at the level of speech acts. However, the analysis does not depend on "intention" as implied in speech acts theory.

Findings

Three categories of kindergarten children's competencies were found: metalinguistic awareness of regularities in language use; ability to make

public a confusion or a problem; and the artful variation of the components of the Ways of Speaking (Hymes, 1972) to accomplish a purpose.

Regularities

Address forms. A pattern of addressee forms according to the relationship of the participants, which is part of the politeness aspect of our norms of interaction, was delineated by one child in response to another's surprise:

#During Hall-walk Transition# (Transcription conventions are listed in Appendix C)

Ka: Did you see my mother go by? . . . Her name is Marie.
Ch: Marie?
Ka: But you guys call her Mrs. Jones, 'cept for the big people. I call her mother 'cause she's my mother.

Another child commented upon the incongruity of a babyish term in association with a kindergartner, a metalinguistic awareness of stylistic co-occurrence:

Ca: #Reacting to seeing Joe's album of baby pictures at Sharing Time# He was cute. He still is cute.
Br: Joe is cute. Then he'd still be a baby.

Terms of endearment and family appellations were freely used during house-play and were varied humorously during Arrival Time and at departure. However, during Work Time, several children questioned their appropriateness. Appropriate use of these forms depended on the Scene, the children's definition of what was going on at the time. Thus, when a mother was helping the children with a difficult weaving task, the following exchange occurred.

Ta: Does this, does it have to go under or over?
Mrs. C.: Well . . . It's your choice. It's after that that you don't get a choice. Helping you sweetie.
Ta: . . . Sweetie? #high-low intonation#
Mrs. C.: I shouldn't have called you that, should I . . . I call everybody tha:--boys and girls.

Yet the same child, Tammy, during the Draw and Tell task, produced a familial term to which another child took exception:

Ta: Sorry, darling.
Tr: #laughs# I'm not your husband.

Tammy's use of "darling" suggests that she interprets this scene very differently from that of the classroom work situation. Corroboration for this interpretation comes from internal evidence. That is, Tammy was an infrequent contributor to classroom discourse, but during Draw and Tell she produced about half of her total speaking turns, including songs, slang, and colloquial fillers.

Tracy, who objected to the endearment term in the above example, was able to describe the pattern for use of such terms. During an evaluation session, he reported on the house-keeping play:

Tr: But we called us names like momma or sompin' like that.
I called him dada. He called me momma.

These children were therefore aware of a sociolinguistic regularity, that the form of address depends on the situation.

Greetings. Awareness of a pattern of greeting was demonstrated by many children. The index to this awareness is the shift to a joking key. During Arrival Time, exchanges such as "Hi, grandma, Hi, sissy, Hi, poppa" were common. During Committee Time, one child, seemingly bored with his assignment, initiated a long greeting exchange which finally devolved into an interesting conversation. His variations in the addressee slot included: Hi Brian, Sir Lion; Hi Pupu Sir; Hi snowflake Hi, Hicco, Hi, Turkey.

Question-answer sequence. That some children were aware of another regularity, the form of classroom question-answer sequence, was also indicated

by a shift to the humorous key. They played with the message form. When Tracy, breathing hard, entered the school building, Joe initiated the following sequence:

Jo: Did you run?
Tr: Yeah.
Jo: On your bottom?
Ka: On your head?
Jo: On your nose? On your feet?
Tr: On my feet.
Jo: Oh, on your feet.
Ka: Where's your feet?
Tr: Down there. #points#
Jo: No, your feet are up here. #points up, laughs#
Ka: Yeah, there they are.

Joe and Kathy can play with the question-answer sequence, but Tracy responds literally.

Situated conventional directives. The children understood the teacher's use of situated conventional directives: statements or questions which are to be interpreted in the situation as commands. There were some, but few, errors. Competence was indicated, moreover, in the students' production of situated conventional directives for their own purposes. For example, Amber, as support for her right to watch another committee, claimed that it was clean-up time. As soon as this spectator goal had been accomplished, Amber tried to join the play. But another child countered with "It's clean-up time." Thereupon Amber changed her strategy saying, "Uh, uh the hand's not up to the twelve." Moreover, in the same episode, another child manipulated the situated conventional directive for his own purposes: Tracy had been trying to get Erna's toy. Suddenly he said, "It's clean-up time" and he grabbed the toy. Then, toy in hand, Tracy said, "It's not up to the twelve, right?" Erna showed her awareness of his ploy with, "Now come on, you

tricked us . . . I know your trick. You (just said) it's clean-up time because . . . "

The children were aware that certain words were not to be used in school. This regularity of classroom language was honored in the breach. The hearers would censor the words with threats to call the teacher. One speaker said dum-dum, but in a whisper, a shift of mode (Instrumentality). Another responded to a threat to tell the teacher, during Committee Time, with the retraction, "Your're not dum-dums. You're lollipops," a shift of message content which succeeded. Threats, whispers, retractions all demonstrate an awareness of a class regularity: certain words were inappropriate for the situation.

Recall of discourse. Another metalinguistic ability of the kindergarten children was their facility with recall of previous discourse. Recall of discourse is a significant competency because it is fundamental to the construction of sociolinguistic regularities. For example, during Snack Time, the teacher said "Just one per customer." Sharon chimed in with, "You always say that." Indeed, review of earlier transcripts confirmed this repetition. Similarly, when the teacher commiserated with a child, "It's rather sad, isn't it, when someone you love dies," Tracy commented, "Once you said that to Carmen." The teacher agreed, saying, "Yes. Carmen's great-grandfather died right before Christmas. That's sad too, isn't it."

Of course, many children were aware of their own previous statements. For instance, when I addressed a child by name on the first day of my visit, she paused and then said, "You knew my name 'cause I told you." Also, during Sharing Time, many speakers objected to repetitive questions with "I already

told you that." During Group Time, "I said it first" and "That's what I said" were frequent comments. However, during Work Time, children often insisted that their partners repeat exactly what had been said. The most elaborate instance of the pattern of letting someone else have your say occurred at the sand table:

Be: If you need any gushy wushy water, just tell me . . .
Ka: I need some more water.
Be: Say "gushy wushy water."
Ka: Gushy water, some more, please.
Be: You already got yours . . .
Ka: I need some water, please. What is the name of the water?
Be: Gushy wushy. Say, "May I please have some gushy wushy water?"
Ka: May I please have some gushy wushy water?
Be: Sure you can.

Soon after this episode, Betty declared Kathy to be boss and then told Kathy what to say in her boss position:

Be: . . . Let's say you said, "What are you making?"
Ka: What are you making? . . .
Be: And you told me to make a design.
Ka: Make a design!

These examples have demonstrated a competence: awareness of the precise form of a message. In addition, the content of previous discourse was also recalled. On one occasion, the teacher announced the subject for discussion, and Tracy complained, "We talked about that last night." Indeed the same subject had been discussed the day before. Some children recalled patterns of discourse. Sonja reported what her mother usually says upon receiving her school craft constructions. Kenneth provided this insight:

Ke: You ask me when I'm doing something important, I just say, "Wait a minute, later on." If they ask me more than one time, I'm going to do it. But you only asked me once.

Norms of interaction. The children often commented on the norms of interaction for classroom talk. They mentioned "Just use a normal voice,"

"use an inside voice," "take your fingers out of your mouth." They objected to interruptions, "Kathy was talking," "I can't hear, if everybody's talking." They were frequently aware of who talks and when, "Carmen always has a question." When the teacher was introducing the new structure for Sharing Time, Sharon knew who talks:

T: . . . when we have Sharing Time, guess who does a lot of talking?
Sh: You!

Moreover, during the final structure, two children described their conception of the teacher's role:

Tr: I--I thought you meant on Sharing Time, you--you weren't going to talk.
Sh: How come the teacher talks?

There were frequent statements indicating anticipation of the turn-allocation procedures, such as: "Now we go on to me." Also, children knew the routine for not taking a turn well enough to verbalize it: "When we don't need to talk, you're supposed to say pass." There were comments on the truthfulness of speech:

Sh: I told you a hundred times.
Ch: Don't believe her. She doesn't talk right.

In addition, there were comments on length of Sharing Time contributions. Sharon said, "This is going to go on forever." After this remark, the teacher shaped an ending to the contribution and then initiated a class discussion in which she solicited suggestions for limiting long contributions. These quotations reflect an awareness of the norms of interaction for classroom discourse, although they also imply that breaches were common.

These examples have shown that many of the kindergarten children reflect upon the regularities of language as used in the classroom. Regularity

challenges their minds. Moreover, many children adapt school language conventions to their own purposes. Several of the identified regularities could be cast in the form of hypotheses to verify the frequency of metalinguistic awareness among other populations. We turn next to another type of competency, the ability to make public a confusion or a problem.

Publicizing Confusions

It was clear from the transcripts that kindergarten children confronted many problems. A useful verbal strategy was an announcement of the problem, such as "my zipper's stuck." This strategy led to a solution--timely assistance. Of course, the existence of the problem can also be considered as an incompetency. My decision to include statements of confusion as a competency rests on the opportunity they provide for clarification or assistance.

Gauging audience membership. According to Hymes, participants in an interaction include the speaker, the addressee and the audience including both intended and unintended hearers. The kindergarten children frequently failed to understand their roles as unintended hearers when the teacher addressed the whole group with remarks targeted to a few. The teacher's goal appeared to be compliance, not comment. However, the children who had already complied, or didn't need to, frequently did comment:

T: So please try to keep the scissors in the right place.
Ch: But I always put them away.

The teacher usually ended Sharing Time with "Put your sharing things away." To this cue, children replied:

Am: Then I'll put my skirt in my cubby hole. #laughs#
Sh: OK. I'll take off my clothes.
Je: I can't put--how can I take off my jump-suit?

The last comment caused the teacher to amend her request with "unless you're wearing it," but the children continued:

Ch: OK, then I'll have to take off my head.
Ch: And I will put my teeth away.
Sh: Shall I put my hair in my cubby hole?

The teacher, in this case, did not provide an explanation. However, the library teacher did provide some clarification:

T: Will you put your chairs in.
Jo: I wasn't sitting in a chair.
T: Well, push it in anyway, please.

Comments, such as "Well, push it in anyway, please," provided information as to the teacher's purpose, compliance, not determination of ownership of a problem. (Olson and Hildyard, 1981, discuss a reciprocal version of this problem: children's differential interpretations of statements as requiring assent or compliance.)

Two instances of misunderstanding of the teacher's targeting a subgroup for her remarks involved vocatives, which identify the addressees. Teachers often use cautionary vocatives as contextualization cues (Green & Wallat) to shape compliant behavior. Two children were confused:

T: Kenneth, Stanley, look here!
K: What do you mean Kenneth-Stanley. I'm Kenneth.

In the other instance, the teacher, at the end of Arrival Time, attempted to hurry the children to the group meeting area by asking Tracy to return some binoculars to their owner. She simultaneously cautioned Joseph and Wyman, who were waiting for a turn, that time had run out. This complicated speech act was confusing to Stanley:

T: Can you give those back to Adler for a few minutes; Joe, Wyman.
St: Joe and Wyman can't give those.

These examples demonstrate that middle-class, native-English speaking kindergarten children find some of the participation structures of the classroom problematic. This problem has been well documented for children from other cultures and economic groups. My data analysis suggests that learning the participation structures may be a problem for all children upon entry to school. What the problems are, moreover, can be discovered by searching for public announcements of confusion from outspoken children.

Expectation of newness in discourse. Another confusion which many students made public was an expectation that conversations even in school should highlight new, not old information. The index for this confusion was a jarring "I know."

T: You're back. How are you?
Br: I know. I was sick.
T: I'm so glad.

Here, Brent's "I know" refers to "You're back," a statement of the obvious. Likewise, the teacher's final remark, "I'm so glad," cannot be a response to "I was sick" but can be interpreted as a completion of the thought which motivated stating the obvious.

There were several examples of children's objections to being told information they already knew from the Draw and Tell task. Each child had been told to instruct another in drawing something. The listener often complained. For instance:

Ni: . . . You need to make the sky blue.
Ad: I know, Nigel. Are you silly? 'Cause I know what color a sky is.

Sharing Time contributions, especially in the first structure, frequently elicited this complaint.

Jo: The arms can come off and so can the cape
Tr: I knew that.
Jo: So can the arms.
Ch: #mockingly# Then his arms.
Jo: Then his knucklehead.
Ch: #laughter#

Joe has switched here to a humorous key, a response, I believe, to the audience's objections to having the obvious stated. My interpretation is bolstered by the frequent Sharing Time complaint, "You already shared that." The teacher, however, disagreed with my interpretation. She considered that Joseph was "just being a wiseacre." The hypothesis that entering kindergarten children expect discourse to contain new information needs to be tested in other populations. If it is confirmed, however, teachers could be sensitized to their predilection.

Soliciting help with reading. A competency with the written channel was the ability to shift from private, silent reading to public, oral reading when a difficulty arose. This is a shift to knowledgeable peers or adults as intended hearers. Among the kindergarten children were several who announced problems with letter names, words on wall charts, toys, log-notes, library cards, and sentences on their drawings, or in books. These were all voluntarily chosen reading tasks. Moreover, many such announcements occurred outside periods of direct reading or reading readiness instruction, during Arrival Time, Transition Times, and Work Time. For instance, Erna commented while showing a drawing from home during Arrival Time, "I didn't have letters in it 'cause I can't, can't read." Then she showed the reverse side of the page on which she had, indeed, written letters. The teacher immediately launched into a letter identification lesson. Similarly, the teacher explained one of the mysteries of the library card system when Carmen attended to the writing:

Ca: C, a, r, m. That's my last letter of my name.
T: Yes, it is.
Ca: You havta add my middle name.
T: No, you don't. Have your class, OK?

These announcements elicited timely mini-teaching acts from the attending adults. This suggests that understanding the full range of children's comptence with the written channel requires consideration of self-motivated learning in a wider range of situations than usually examined. (For anthropological constructs that would inform such research at the secondary level, see Bloome, 1982.)

Publicizing confusions can lead to appropriate assistance. This competency has been examined by others, for instance the "Service-like events" during reading groups described by Merritt (1982). The examples given in this section suggest that such research could be significantly extended by including all the varied situations of the school day. We turn, finally, to children's artful variation of the components of ways of speaking as indices of communicative competence.

Artful Variation of the Components of Ways of Speaking

The kindergarten children's communicative competence was most dramatically revealed by their artful variation of the components of Ways of Speaking to convey or mask their intent. Intent, here, is to be considered as being continuously constructed during an exchange. Since a single statement may derive from several simultaneous intentions, interpretation of intent rests upon the consequences of the statement as opposed to the assignment of a single anterior motive (Streek, 1980).

Rescuing following errors. We have seen above that Erna extricated herself from the mistake of calling her colleagues dum-dums by a shift of

content, calling them lollipops. A shift of content was also used, and frequently, following a display of ignorance. As one example, Brent, in a conversation with his teacher displayed considerable knowledge about oceans but right after a mistake, he shifted the topic:

Br: I think the Pacific.
T: That's exactly right. It's the biggest ocean in the world.
Br: I know, but that's the ocean the Statue of Liberty's on.
T: No. The Statue of Liberty's on the Atlantic.
Br: Oh, yeah. But streams attach on to oceans.

A shift to humorous genre of word play was used twice in rapid succession by Brent in response to different misstatements during woodwork: Brent first made an error in address. A few minutes later, he suggested a forbidden action. The same word-play develops in both episodes:

Br: Drill it, Wyman.
Wy: He's not Wyman.
Br: I know, crazy.
Wy: Then why'd you call him Wyman?
Br: I forgot his name, crazy.
Wy: You're crazy.
Br: You're crazy . . . You're crazy, you're nazy, crazy, crazy, tazy.

Wm: Everything I make my brother destroys . . .
Br: How come?
Wm: 'Cause he likes it. He likes destroying.
Br: I'd kill him. I'd kill him with my B.B. gun.
Da: Don't kill anybody.
Br: I'm kidding, Daniel. Why do you have to get so crazy?
Wm: Yeah, mazy.
Br. Yeah, dazy.
Wm: I hope my brother doesn't . . . Look! I put some nails in there and it cracked. My brother won't ever, won't be able to get that off.

It is from this shift of content back to the original subject that we can determine that the word-play diverted attention from the errors.

Occasionally, a child shifted to a teasing genre. For instance, Lottie achieved entry to a play situation (after some 20 minutes of trying) by

assuming an unpopular role, the mean wife. She then interfered with Kenneth's boats. To Kenneth's objections, she mockingly mimicked his protests. Kenneth took a swing at Lottie, who continued then with her teasing genre:

Ke: Maybe meanest wife. Hey, don't, don't don't. That's my boat.
Lo: *Don't, don't, don't. That's my boat.* #mockingly#
Ke: Should I hit you in the across, the face. Oh come on . . .
Lo: Missed me, missed me. Now you have to kiss me.
Ke: #mimicks# Miss me miss me (sic). Now you have to kiss me.
Tr: All right, I'll kiss you.
Lo: Two little lovers, sitting in a tree--.

Another shift in content was used by several children during Water Play committee.[1] Each committee in succession chose to play at being witches making poison, and in three sessions poison was offered to the adults. Each time the poison potion was converted to a harmless substance. Moreover, this content shift was accompanied by apology and dramatic voice implying some sense of etiquette breach.

So: Would you like some poison stuff? . . . *A couple of drinks, you will die.* *Ae, Ae, Ae* #witch voice#.
Lo: Now ask that old lady if she'd like a cup of water.
So: *Would you like a cup of water?* . . . *Excuse me, we're witches and witches *tee hee*
Lo: I'll just give her the pints. Just, I'm just going to give her the good stuff. You know what I'm going to give her? I'm going to give her grape juice. Give this to her full of grape juice.
So: Want some grape juice instead?

The final rescue involved a shift of the form of speech. One child used a Donald Duck voice to question my log-note activity. She said:

Be: *What are you doing?* #High, low, low high intonation#
P : Writing down what you say.
Be: That's what the baby asked.

---

[1] Children were assigned to committees. Each committee spent one Work Time period at one of five designated tasks on successive days.

My interpretation is that Betty used the Donald Duck register and the baby ascription to mask her intent to ask a possibly inappropriate question.

These examples thus far have demonstrated the children's shifts in the components of Ways of Speaking to accomplish their purposes during Work Time. Even more striking were the shifts that occurred for the general purpose of getting or maintaining the interest of an audience.

Getting the audience attention. During Arrival Time, some children managed to get the attention of the teacher to report their news easily. Other indicated that they had difficulty, or expected difficulty, in getting an audience. One solution was the use of exaggerated starts as an attention-getter. Thus Amber produced, on two different sessions: "Teacher, guess what once I was . . ." and "Shut your eyes. Open them." From other children we find:

Wm: You wouldn't believe what I brang.
T: What did you bring?

Br: I got Silver. Know what I got in here? Silver.
T: Hey, isn't he terrific.

Exaggerated starts, a shift in message form, succeeded for these children. In one instance, however, silence was also effective. Jessica was the least frequent contributor to the Arrival Time exchanges. With Jessica, the teacher initiated a topic. Silence as an attention-getter deserves further research across different populations with different teachers. Getting the attention of the audience was accomplished during Sharing Time by turn-allocation procedures and the operation of established norms of interaction for that event. Maintaining audience interest, however, was problematic. We will look next at some successful handling of this problem.

Maintaining audience interest. Sharing Time presented the main opportunity for children to address the peer audience. There were two structures for Sharing Time during the research period. In the first, nominated children stood in front of the group. The teacher engaged the child in a dialogue, frequently switching the content to topics of curricular importance: colors, numbers, and shapes. In the second structure children and the teacher sat in a circle on the floor. Turns were allocated automatically by coursing the circle. The children commented and questioned the sharing child by inserting remarks at pauses in the conversation, and the teacher was a minor participant. There was an average of six participants per topic in this arrangement. (For further information, see Lazarus & Homer, 1981.) What is important for this paper is that under the final structure the sharing child coped with the audience's reaction without the help of the teacher. Under this condition, the display of communicative competence was impressive.

Discussions of sharing times occurred across speech events, during Arrival Time, Group Time, and at Transition Time. Upon arrival, many children excitedly showed their objects to the teacher. But Stanley worried, "I have something to share that nobody might want to see." And Tammy whispered to me, "I got a present for the teacher . . . Want to know what it is? Well, don't tell her." Sharon showed her item to Betty, but then resisted showing it to others with the statement, "Why do I have to show it to everyone, when it's a secret?" Another time, Sharon pretended that she was going to share a new hair style, hidden beneath her cap. This ruse continued as Sharon wore her cap throughout Arrival, Transition, and Group Activities. The ruse was exposed at Sharing Time with a triumphant "There" followed by an

explanation of her mother's purchase of the special hat. Many children kept their items in paper bags, pockets or behind t'.eir backs. Maintaining secrecy involved selecting a few from the many possible hearers, or shifting to a whispering mode, or using non-verbal concealment tactics. Yet the teacher reported in a follow-up interview that she had never counseled secrecy. What relevant contrast do these data suggest? It would seem that the children's goals for Sharing Time differed substantially from the teachers. For the secretive children, the goal seemed to be to please the peer audience; whereas for the teacher the goal, as stated in the interviews, was to extend and elaborate children's language (first structure) and to increase children's opportunity to talk (second structure). Secrecy was one way to heighten interest. It indicates a communicative competency, attending to audience reaction.

As the reader may remember, there was also a powerful peer sanction against sharing the same item more than once in the form of complaints that it had already been shared. What we will examine next are ways that children coped with this problem, whether it was anticipated or not. In the first structure of Sharing Time, it was the teacher who handled such complaints. She also extended the remarks of a child who simply labeled his/her object. Carmen introduced her topic with a simple label under both structures. Under the first condition, the teacher switched the content, and Carmen contributed few words:

Ca: My shirt.
T: Isn't that nice. Candy, flowers, and ladybug and grass. Just one ladybug, I guess, huh?
Ca: Uh huh.
T: Great. It goes very nice with your pants.
Ca: Thank you.

However, under the second structure, Carmen accomplished her own rescue using denial, explanation, attention-getting devices, and finally a shift in content:

Ca: My lady bug shirt.
Ch: You already shared that.
Ca: Uh uh.
Ch: Well, we seen it.
Ca: I wore it. And guess who got it for me. Guess, guess what. Guess who gave it to me. My Aunt . . . uncle, and Aunt Rachel . . . and Frances and Jenkin and Millie. They were all together so they bought it for me. And my mom and dad.

A shift of content to the emotional aspect was once successful for Amy. When she showed her rocks and a doll, the following exchange took place:

Am: These and this.
Sh: You already shared that a long, long time ago.
Am: I just like her a lot.
Ch: Can I see her?
Am: Her name's Sharon.
Je: Does . . . she crawl? Show us!
Am: #Winds toy and demonstrates#.

Another solution to maintaining audience interest was a shift in genre. In this example, Amy again announced her item with a brief label, but then she picked up on the children's comments and questions to convert her turn into a guessing game:

Am: My dress.
Ch: It's candy.
Re: Is it a candy dress?
Am: Everybody has to guess. And guess what, it is a school dress . . .
Ka: Well, I see there's candy on there. A candy school dress.
Am: Uh huh.

Stanley also developed a genre shift in consort with peer responses. In the course of his presentation, Stanley made a labeling error. A pattern of mislabeling with peer correction then evolved:

St: My hat.
Sh: Looks like a hand.
St: It's a hat. My hand's in it, but it's a hat. And my mittens. They're all wet. And my (pause) hat. #shows coat#
Sh: That's not a hat.
St: #Chuckles# My coat, I mean.
Ch: He called his . . . coat a hat.
St: Big giant coat! #shows hat#
Ch: No, that's your coat.
St: I mean my big giant hat . . . giant hat.
T: This group needs to put their sharing things away.

This is the only instance of the teacher's ending of Sharing Time while a child's turn was in progress. In a follow-up interview, she explained that she felt the children were getting "silly" which was not her purpose for the event. The transcripts show, however, that Stanley knew that he had already talked about his big coat, mittens, and hat; and, moreover, that he was the child who had worried that others might not want to see his item. I infer, therefore, that Stanley was sensitive to his peer audience's reaction and was enjoying his success.

Obtaining possession of an object: Directives. Children's communicative competencies in obtaining help from the teacher or from peers during reading activities have been examined by Merritt (1980) and Wilkinson and Calculator (1982) respectively. These researchers have determined the features of request forms as used by individual children which accomplished a particular function, getting help. The analyses are restricted, however, to an academic task. Ervin-Tripp (1982) has discussed methodological and other difficulties involved in the investigation of children's directives. We cannot judge the range of a child's school communicative competency with directives without consideration of his/her production throughout the school day. What we would need to know is whether an individual unsuccessful in the reading task is yet able to produce well-formed requests in other school situations.

In my research, the Water Play Committee provided one alternative situation for examining directives. The time period, equipment, and obligatory attendance stayed constant for all children. During water play, there were 208 directives to obtain possession of an object that were produced within 52 exchanges. Most exchanges, therefore, included several directives in rapid succession. No patterning of sequential variations of form was discerned. The variations represented shifts of key and politeness norms. As Hymes (1972) says "Key is introduced to provide for the tone, manner, or spirit in which an act is done. It corresponds roughly to modality among grammatical categories" (p. 62). The variations also represent shifts in the norms of interaction (in this case politeness) for the setting. Brown and Levinson (1979) provide a taxonomy of politeness strategies which are applied differentially according to the effect of multiple, simultaneous factors. The kindergarten children used rapid, successive shifts in the components of ways of speaking for their directives. It seems, therefore, that what counted as communicative competence in this situation, was mastering a repertoire of politeness strategies. One example, which was the longest, will demonstrate the kind of repertoire that was noted:

Ke: This is poison. I stirring stuff up. You have to cooperate with us. You give us whatever I need because of my two long teeth . . . Cooperate! You have to cooperate or the teacher will get very upset.
Ca: I know, but we need this . . . Kenneth, if I, if I let you on my side, would you let me play with these two and you play with these two?
Ke: Sure.
Ca: Thanks a lot.
Ke: Yeah, but if I need something, you have to give me it. Remember, I'm Dracula.
Ca: Kenneth, I don't like you playing that.
Ke: Than I shouldn't be Dracula.
Ca: I need a--I need a toy for it. I guess you shouldn't have. Guess why? I don't like you.

Ke: If you don't like me, I won't bring you no present like I was next Christmas.
Ca: I don't need no present from you.
Ke: Know what's going to be? A necklace . . . You'd love this kind of necklace. Some is cats and some is birds.
Ca: I like diamonds.
Ke: You also have a diamond.
Ca: Well, listen, Kenneth, I was over here first.

Kenneth and Carmen have used shifts of key and the negative and positive politeness strategies: stating the face threatening act as a general rule or threat, impersonalization, conventional indirection, reciprocity, a positive face threat, and a bribe. All this variation of form occurred among partners for whom status relations were partially controlled by the situation. Different variations of form could be expected if the participants were of unequal status, such as between teacher and child. It is clear that the use of Brown and Levinson's framework applied throughout the classroom situations is needed for the assessment of communicative competencies of individual children with directives in school.

Conclusion

A wide range of communicative competencies of children in a kindergarten class have been identified using a sociolinguistic perspective. A productive system for locating such competencies is the taxonomy, Ways of Speaking (Hymes, 1972). Attending to shifts in the components of Ways of Speaking in school discourses would help both teachers and researchers assess competence.

The competencies were distributed among three categories: awareness of regularities in the use of language in the classroom; ability to publicize confusions; and artful variations of the components of Ways of Speaking for children's purposes.

Children were aware of the regularities in address forms, greetings, question-answer sequencing, and the norms of interaction of the classroom. They adopted classroom language patterns for their own purposes. They were aware of the precise message form and content of the teacher's customary remarks, their own, and their classmates' utterances, a competency fundamental to the construction of sociolinguistic regularity.

Publicizing confusions was considered a competency in that it frequently elicited an explanation. The identified confusions involved problems with reading; expectation of newness in discourse when much of school language relates to old, rather than new, content; and understanding their role as unintended hearers when the teacher targeted a subgroup for her remarks. Teachers would do well to respond to such confusions with clarification. Since these articulate children shared the middle-class background of the teacher and school, their confusions cannot be attributed to cultural or economic differences. Their problems in adaptation to classroom language suggest that there exists a minimal set of difficulties that all children face upon entrance to school. Such difficulties need further investigation to determine their frequency in other populations.

The kindergarten children artfully varied the components of speech to accomplish their own purposes. They were able to rescue themselves following errors and inappropriate statements. They managed to get and maintain the attention of both the teacher and their peer audience. They possessed a repertoire of directives to be called upon. The teacher was not aware of this type of competency. It was usually displayed when children's goals concerned peers, such as maintaining the audience's interest during Sharing Time

or Work Time. In some cases, the teacher's goals were in conflict with the child's. The teacher's goals for Sharing Time included extensions and elaborations and promoting conversation; old content was acceptable. The children demanded new and interesting content. This disparity of goals presents a problem for researchers also. Further research needs to be addressed to school children's communicative competence in informal as well as formal displays.

Investigation of students' protocols throughout days could inform research assessing communicative competencies during academic tasks. As stated in Higgins, Fondacaro and McCann (1981), "Even when students have not acquired the most effective strategies for attaining the task goals emphasized by the teacher, it would be misleading to characterize the students as poor communicators if they are perfectly capable of maximizing the attainment of their own goals."

What constitutes communicative competence in school, as this paper shows, is a provocative question suggesting further research.

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Appendix A

Components of Ways of Speaking
Adapted from Hymes

S: "Setting refers to the time and place of a speech act, and in general, to the physical circumstances."

"Scene . . . designates the psychological setting or the cultural definition of an occasion as a certain type of scene."

P: Participants include the speaker or sender; addressor; hearer or receiver, or audience; addressee.

E: Ends encompass outcomes and goals from the perspective of the group and from the perspective of the individual.

A: Act Sequence includes message form and message content.

K: Key refers to "the tone, manner, or spirit in which an act is done . . . when it is in conflict with the overt content of an act, it often overrides the latter (as in sarcasm)."

I: Instrumentalities refers to channels (e.g., written or oral, including modes such as singing or whispering) and forms of speech (codes, varieties, and registers).

N: Norms include rules of interaction (e.g., not interrupting, turn-taking, use of normal voice, use of features appropriate to the pertinent social structure such as politeness features) and rules of interpretation.

G: Genres include "categories such as poem, myth, tale, . . . etc."

Appendix B

Speaking Turn Frequencies by Individual Child and Activity

CHILD	SEX	DAYS ABSENT	ARRIVAL	COMMITTEE	DRAW & TELL	DISCUSSION/ EDUCATION	GROUP MEETING	MISCELLANEOUS	RECESS	SHARING	SPECIALS	WORKTIME	TOTALS
Am	F	1	20	54	201	17	37	23		80	20	12	464
Be	F		22	89	185	25	52	58		66	36	128	661
Ca	F	2	21	46	119	15	54	10		99	39	51	454
Er	F	2	27	75	76	7	12	26	22	42	10	55	352
Je	F	1	8	57	106	21	37	29	5	103	40	22	428
Ka	F		31	19	147	12	31	15		70	16	98	439
Lo	F	3	26	33	25	2	14	14	3	39	11	135	302
Re	F		20	37	159	15	25	17	6	34	12	19	344
Sh	F		66	49	29	30	88	51	11	107	49	73	553
So	F		17	71	113	10	6	9	10	32	22	48	338
Ta	F	1	21	53	181	9	14	20		49	12	32	391
AdM	M		16	29	141	16	8	28	5	26	32	52	353
Br	M	1	10	76	133	14	34	47	2	110	16	86	528
Da	M	1	17	25	78	13	14	4		75	11	46	283
Jo	M		38	92	124	26	38	31	1	130	39	36	555
Ke	M		6	52	189	10	24	39	1	66	30	242	659
Ni	M	1	34	26	128	11	24	17		59	17	2	348
St	M		116	51	76	24	47	123	8	123	33	118	719
Tr	M		24	77	71	9	51	33		77	13	84	439
Wm	M	2	18	8	115		17	27		34	8	41	268

TOTAL: 8878 MEAN: 444 STANDARD DEVIATION: 128

Appendix C

Transcript Symbols

#	#Context, Author Interpretations
. . .	Deletion
xxx	Garbled Speech
( )	Probable Gloss
* *	Dramatic Voice
Ch	Unidentified Child
T	Teacher
P	Participant Observer